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# Moscow's Response to the Diplomatic Challenge in Southern Africa

An Intelligence Assessment

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SOV 84-10069X  
May 1984

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## Moscow's Response to the Diplomatic Challenge in Southern Africa

### Key Judgments

*Information available  
as of 2 May 1984  
was used in this report.*

Moscow is clearly apprehensive that South Africa's recent agreements with Angola and Mozambique may weaken the Soviet position in these key southern African states and undermine efforts to support Namibian and South African insurgents. Soviet commentary has focused on Angola rather than on Mozambique, because the USSR has more at stake in Luanda and a greater ability to affect developments there.

While criticizing US and South African motives for arranging it, the Soviets have not criticized the Angolan cease-fire itself. We believe this reflects their belief that (1) a South African withdrawal from southern Angola will improve the worsening military position of the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and (2) the disengagement is unlikely to lead to an overall settlement of the Namibia question.

If the Soviets believed the MPLA leaders were moving toward a Namibia accord that included a Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola, they would bring pressure to bear on them, as they have done in the past. As a last resort, Moscow might try to protect its interests by promoting a coup by MPLA hardliners. Given the risks inherent in coups, however, and given MPLA determination to resolve the Namibia question, we believe the Soviets would ultimately accede to Luanda's wishes. Moscow would continue to work behind the scenes to maintain its influence within the MPLA and to sustain Luanda's suspicions of Washington and Pretoria.

Although the Soviets have less ability to influence events in Mozambique and are evidently dismayed by the extent of President Machel's accommodation with South Africa, they have not written off Mozambique. Moscow almost certainly will seek to exploit Machel's continued need for military assistance in an effort to limit his turn to the West, but we do not believe it is any more willing than in the past to subsidize Maputo's economic development.

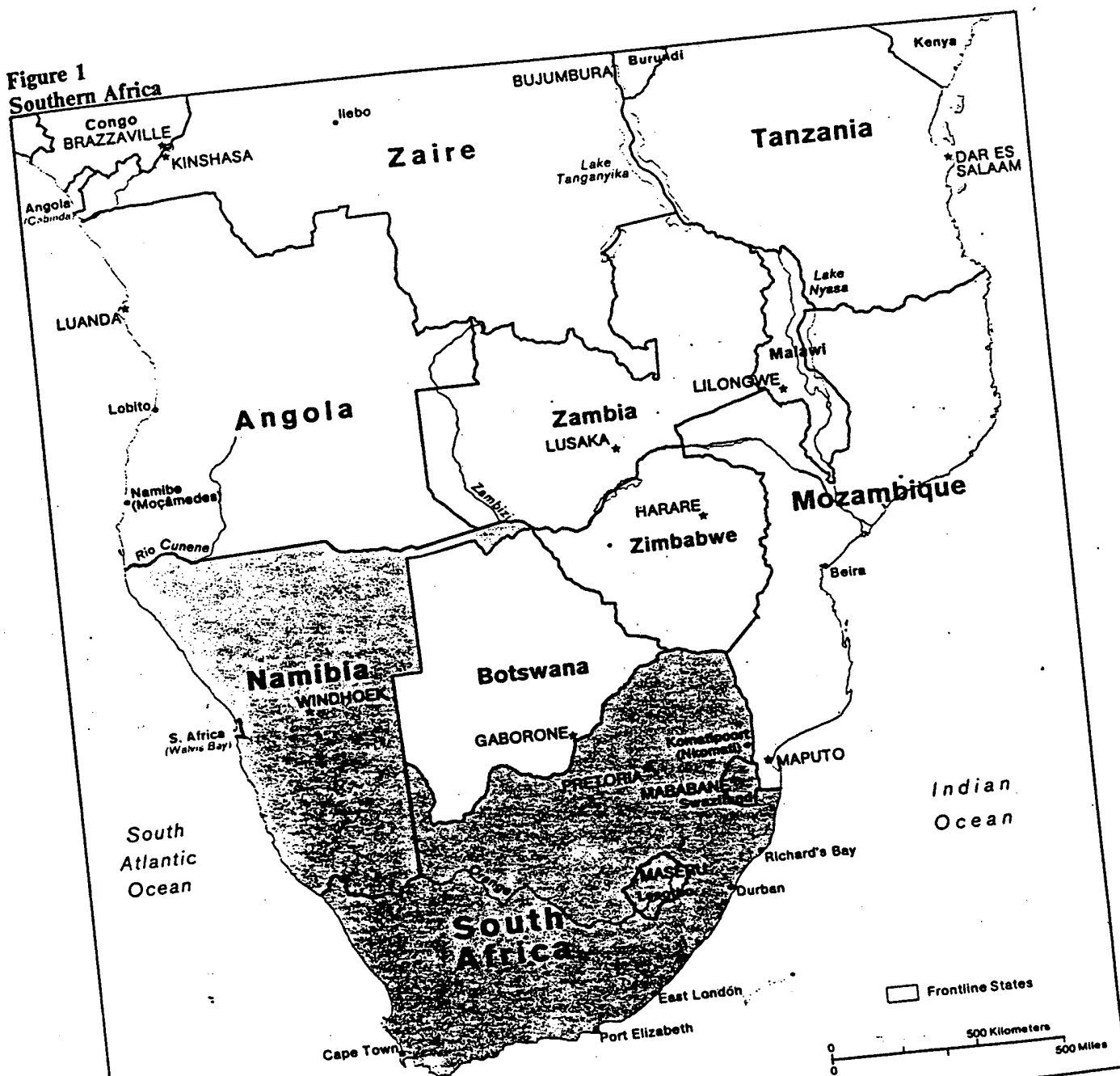
Elsewhere in southern Africa, the Soviets will try to foment and exploit new tensions to undermine South African diplomacy and to sustain the struggle against white minority rule in Pretoria. They will seek to channel additional assistance to the Namibian and South African insurgents wherever possible. Without the traditional conduits in Angola and Mozambique, however, they are unlikely to enjoy much success.

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**Figure 1**  
**Southern Africa**



**Unclassified**

Boundary representation is  
not necessarily authoritative

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## Moscow's Response to the Diplomatic Challenge in Southern Africa

Moscow's position in southern Africa rests primarily on its role as the region's leading arms supplier. In February and March 1984, however, its key allies there, Angola and Mozambique, concluded agreements with South Africa. These are clearly designed to reduce the military pressures that have made the two countries so dependent upon Soviet military assistance. This paper discusses Moscow's response to the challenges posed by Pretoria's initiatives toward Luanda and Maputo. [REDACTED]

### Soviet Interests in Southern Africa

Moscow's basic aims in southern Africa are to undermine or supplant Western and Chinese influence and to promote leftist change. More specifically, it seeks to consolidate the emerging leftist, pro-Soviet regimes in Angola and Mozambique, to bring the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) to power in Namibia, and ultimately, to undermine the white minority regime in South Africa. Angola is central to these objectives because it positions the USSR to support and influence Namibian and South African insurgents and to exploit potential instability in neighboring Zaire. Through their unqualified support of black African self-determination, the Soviets have also exploited—with some success—black African antipathy toward Pretoria to promote suspicion and distrust of the United States, which Moscow portrays as South Africa's major "ally." [REDACTED]

The Soviets also seek access to southern African landing fields and ports for their air and naval forces. Soviet long-term objectives may also include denial or obstruction of Western access to the region's strategic mineral resources. Even if white minority rule in South Africa ended, however, such a "denial strategy" would encounter serious obstacles, such as the reaction of Western nations and resistance from African leaders who depend on the hard currency from mineral sales. [REDACTED]

The Soviets have made a sizable commitment in arms and money to the socialist-oriented regimes in Angola and Mozambique: the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO). [REDACTED] b3

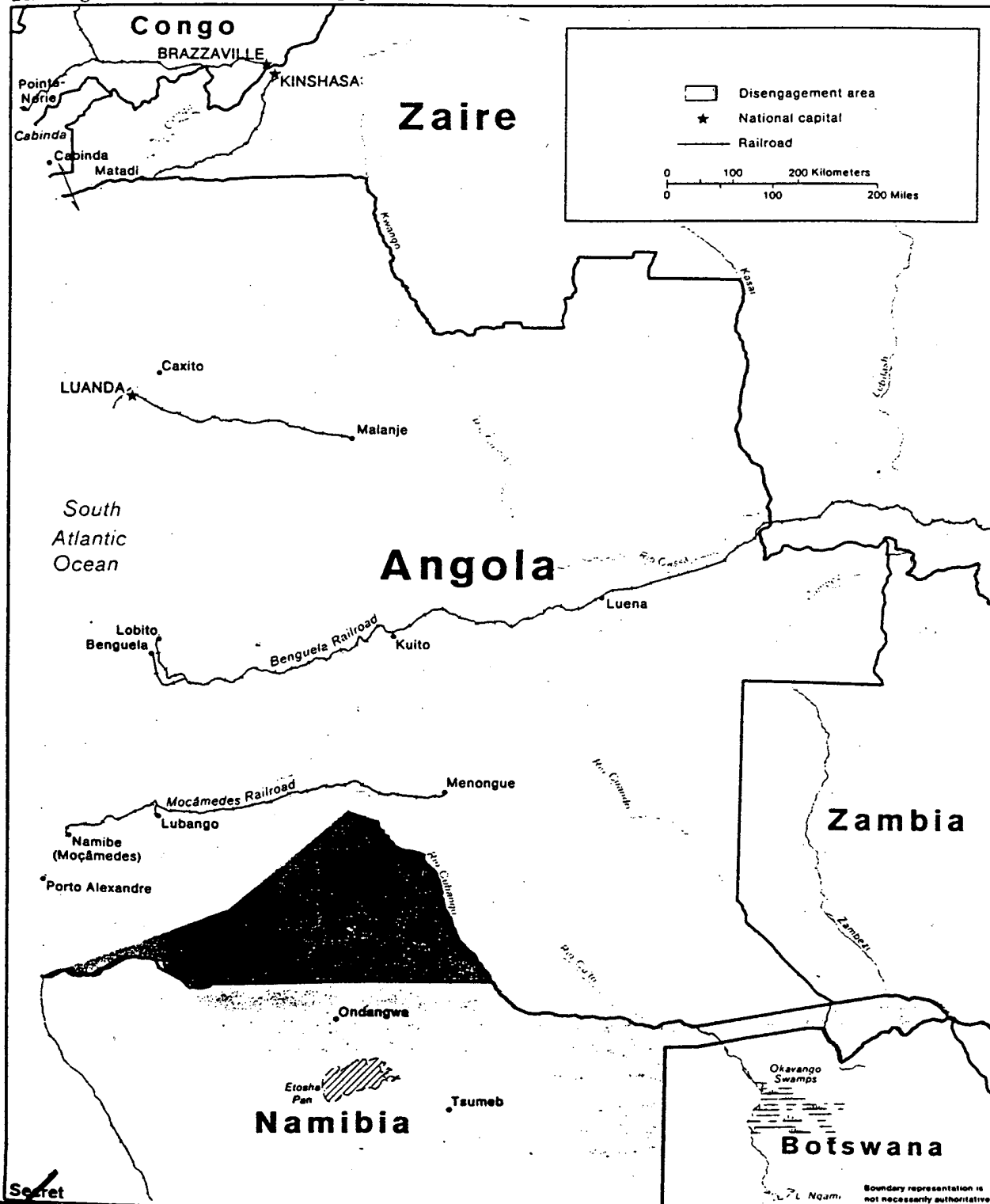
### Moscow's Response to South Africa's Agreements With Angola and Mozambique

General Secretary Chernenko offered the most authoritative Soviet comment on recent developments in southern Africa during a dinner speech on 29 March. He implicitly expressed grudging approval of the accords, while criticizing Washington and Pretoria for exploiting African desires for peace and stability to impose their solutions on the region and indicating his doubts as to whether Angolan security and Namibian independence are "truly" guaranteed. [REDACTED]

Soviet media commentaries reflect the ambivalence with which Moscow views the Angolan and Mozambican accords with South Africa. On 18 March on Soviet television, political analyst Aleksandr Bovin candidly cited the factors and benefits that had induced Luanda and Maputo to reach agreements with Pretoria. Nonetheless, he criticized the accords, saying it was "naive" to think that Pretoria's destabilization efforts could be stopped by "treaties and agreements." He concluded by noting that the region's fundamental problems were all linked to the existence of the white minority regime—implying a need for continued armed struggle. A 30 April *Pravda*

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Figure 2  
The Angolan-South African Disengagement



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### *Angolan-South African Disengagements*

The 16 February 1984 agreement between Angola and South Africa calls for the staged withdrawal of South African forces from southern Angola in exchange for an Angolan commitment not to allow the Namibian guerrillas of the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) to operate in the area vacated by Pretoria. Both sides agreed to establish a Joint Monitoring Commission to police the disengagement area and prevent SWAPO infiltration of northern Namibia.

#### *Background*

In our judgment, Angola views the cease-fire as an opportunity to improve its capability to deal with its own insurgency problem—the increasing threat posed by Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). UNITA has grown steadily stronger since the civil war began in 1975. In recent years Savimbi's forces have ranged far beyond their traditional stronghold in southeastern Angola, devastating the Angolan economy—already weakened by the preindependence departure of Portuguese managers—and now threatening politically sensitive areas of central and northern Angola.

The MPLA regime has not been able to devote its full military resources to combat the UNITA insurgency. Approximately 15,000 Angolan and Cuban troops have been tied down in the south to guard against South African intervention. The South Africans have occupied a large chunk of southern Angola since mid-1981 and have staged repeated incursions deep into Angolan territory in search of SWAPO guerrillas.

Pretoria agreed to the withdrawal for a variety of reasons. US pressure for a gesture of good faith on

Pretoria's part to break the stalemate in the Namibian negotiations was important. Moreover, Pretoria probably views the risk as acceptable—inasmuch as the disengagement agreement requires Luanda to keep SWAPO out of Namibia. The agreement also benefits Pretoria domestically as it eases public concern about South African casualties and the high economic costs of the seemingly endless war.

#### *Prospects*

The first three months of disengagement have been successful, but we believe that building on them to achieve a broader regional settlement will be difficult, because:

- Pretoria continues to link the implementation of the UN plan for Namibia to the withdrawal of Cuban combat troops from Angola.
- Luanda maintains that Cuban troops will not begin to leave Angola until all South African troops have left Angola, all outside aid to UNITA has stopped, and the UN plan for Namibia has been implemented.

Many South Africans believe that Luanda will not agree to a Cuban troop withdrawal until it can deal with the UNITA threat. Consequently, they argue that a regional settlement is possible only if the MPLA and UNITA reconcile, thus permitting a Cuban troop withdrawal and Namibian independence. MPLA leaders, including moderates, still flatly reject the idea of an accommodation with Savimbi.

report on Mozambique highlighted Maputo's continued commitment to socialism and noted somewhat skeptically of the nonaggression pact that "time will show how events will develop."

Soviet media have focused on the Angolan-South African disengagement. No mention was made of Mozambique's nonaggression pact with South Africa until 16 March, the day it was signed.

Angola



Despite Moscow's uneasiness, we have seen no evidence of a Soviet effort to stop the Angolan-South African dialogue since the cease-fire was signed. While castigating Washington and Pretoria, Soviet media have not condemned the agreement itself.

The Soviets may feel there currently is little reason to sabotage Angola's talks with South Africa. The cease-fire and the South African withdrawal from southern Angola have diminished the security threat to the MPLA government—a threat that had prompted the Soviets to send record levels of arms to Luanda in 1983. Moreover, if the cease-fire holds, the Angolans and Cubans could focus all of their energies toward the UNITA insurgency. The Soviets may have misgivings about temporarily leaving the Namibian SWAPO guerrillas in the lurch, but preserving the regime in Luanda is a more important priority.

Moscow has not changed its overall position on Namibia. It continues to call for a unilateral withdrawal of South African forces from Namibia and for implementation of UN Resolution 435.<sup>1</sup> It also continues to criticize any formula that links the South African presence in Namibia to the Cuban troop presence in Angola, stating that the Angolans and Cubans can consider the issue of Cuban withdrawal only after Namibia is independent and the security threat to Angola is eliminated. The Soviets presumably were pleased with the Angolan-Cuban joint statement issued on 21 March, which reaffirmed that the Cubans would not withdraw until after South Africa ends its support of UNITA, withdraws from both Angola and Namibia, and implements the UN plan for the independence of Namibia.

<sup>1</sup> UN 435 calls for a cease-fire, a phased withdrawal of South African forces from Namibia, and the establishment of a UN force to oversee preparations for Namibian elections.



Figure 3. Angolan President dos Santos and Cuban President Castro signing a joint communique, 21 March 1984.

#### Mozambique

In contrast to the publicity it has accorded the Angolan cease-fire, Moscow only belatedly acknowledged the security accord between Mozambique and South Africa. We believe the delay reflects Soviet displeasure with FRELIMO leader Samora Machel.

The Soviets have grounds for concern over Machel's about-face. His rapprochement with Pretoria clearly undercuts Soviet interests and prestige and opens up new opportunities for Western inroads in Mozambique. More importantly, from Moscow's perspective, it diminishes the already limited capabilities of the African National Congress (ANC)—the South African insurgent group in exile—and thus obstructs the USSR's long-term objective of undermining the white minority regime in Pretoria.

The Soviets evidently tried to dissuade Machel from his rapprochement with Pretoria, reportedly alternating the threat of oil cutbacks with offers of free oil. In the past, however, Moscow's aid commitments have not matched Maputo's economic needs, and we believe the Soviets are still unwilling to increase economic assistance enough to dissuade Machel from talking with the South Africans.



### Signals From Havana?

*Amidst the flurry of diplomatic activity in southern Africa, a number of signals suggested that Havana was reevaluating its position on the Cuban troop presence in Angola. An article that appeared in the Cuban daily Granma on 22 February 1984 discussed the Angolan-South African disengagement, prompting speculation that Castro was preparing the way for a Cuban withdrawal from Angola.*

*Although the 21 March joint communique issued during the dos Santos visit seems uncompromising on the preconditions for a troop withdrawal from Angola, it may be designed more to protect Havana's public image than to halt progress on the Namibia question. The fact that Havana has risked raising domestic expectations on the sensitive withdrawal issue indicates that its private posture is not as rigid as the communique suggests.*

*Whatever Castro's thoughts on the Angolan situation, we believe Havana would ultimately accede to Moscow's wishes, whether they be to send additional combat troops or to disengage from Angola entirely. Although tensions could emerge if Castro felt the USSR had sold out in Angola or had used the Cuban troop issue as a pawn in the bigger game of US-Soviet relations, the Soviet-Cuban relationship would remain largely unchanged, because Havana's economic and military dependence upon the Soviet Union is so great.*

The Soviets have acquiesced in Machel's policy shift, at least partly because they have less at stake in Mozambique than in Angola. A Soviet and Cuban intervention brought to power—and sustained—the MPLA in Angola, but the Soviets did not play a comparable role in Mozambique. Soviet prestige,

therefore, is not linked as closely to the survival of the Machel regime. Moreover, the Soviets have less influence in Maputo than in Luanda.

Moscow has not written off Mozambique, however. President Machel was accorded high-level attention at the Andropov funeral in mid-February; the *Pravda* account of his meetings with Politburo member Tikhonov and Deputy Foreign Minister Il'ichev noted that prospects for further development of bilateral relations were favorable. Moreover, deliveries of Soviet military equipment have continued since the accord with South Africa was signed.

### Soviet Prospects and Options

In both Angola and Mozambique, Moscow's immediate objective is to ensure that the accords concluded in February and March do not lead to broader agreements with South Africa.

#### In Angola

Moscow's major concern in Angola is that there be no agreement on a Cuban withdrawal that would seriously diminish Soviet influence. It probably feels that the current talks are unlikely to lead to such a withdrawal—given the deep-seated nature of regional tensions, the UNITA threat, and the Soviet belief that South Africa remains unwilling to relinquish Namibia. Public statements by Lucio Lara and his fellow MPLA hardliner Paulo Jorge suggest that some in Luanda see the current cease-fire and South African withdrawal as an end in itself and that no decision has been reached on any steps beyond a cease-fire. We believe Moscow shares this assessment.

The Soviets therefore may

### *Mozambique's Uneasy Detente With South Africa*

*In a formal ceremony on 16 March 1984 at the border town of Nkomati, Mozambique and South Africa signed a nonaggression pact stating that neither government would allow its territory to be used to prepare acts of violence against the other. In practical terms, Pretoria agreed to stop supporting the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) insurgents in return for Maputo's pledge to prevent guerrilla attacks against South Africa by the African National Congress (ANC).*

#### *Background*

*Machel's decision to sign the Nkomati Accord—the first of its kind between South Africa and a neighboring black state—was hard to make. It stemmed largely, in our judgment, from the economic collapse in Mozambique. Beset by three years of drought and the debilitating attacks of RENAMO guerrillas, large areas of Mozambique were suffering from famine (more than 100,000 Mozambicans have died). The Mozambican security forces—despite large infusions of Soviet military aid—proved incapable of defeating RENAMO, which focused its attacks on key economic targets and foreign economic advisers. The insurgents roam freely in much of the countryside, disrupting food production and impeding the government's provision of drought relief supplies to the peasants.*

*From a broader perspective, Machel's signing of the accord represents a major departure from Mozambique's heretofore rigidly pro-Soviet, anti-Western policies. It reflects Machel's calculation that the value of new South African investments and possible increases in Western economic assistance would outweigh the risk that the Soviets would cut off their military assistance—which in any case had not turned the tide against the insurgents.*

*We expect both sides to work hard to make their detente succeed. Mozambican security personnel have raided ANC facilities in Maputo—showing Pretoria that Machel is holding up his side of the bargain. And Pretoria does not want to see its diplomatic triumph tarnished, as South African businessmen flock into Maputo with offers of new investment. In the short term, therefore, Machel's gamble—dealing with black Africa's devil, the white minority regime in Pretoria—appears to be paying off. In the long term, however, political support for the gamble could be undermined by continued RENAMO activity, albeit at reduced levels once the insurgents' stockpiles are consumed, and by poor economic conditions, even if they are better than today's.*

Nonetheless, Machel's about-face in Mozambique probably has shown Moscow that events in Luanda could also move in a way damaging to Soviet interests. Should the Soviets become suspicious about dos Santos's ultimate aims in dealing with Pretoria, they are likely to exert direct pressure on him. They have done this several times in the past.

The Soviets would react more strongly if the disengagement turned out to be the first step toward a Namibia settlement that included a phased withdrawal of the Cubans. With the departure of the Cuban combat troops, the Soviets would lose much of their leverage in Luanda. If a settlement actually did cut UNITA off from its South African supply lines, and if the MPLA concentrated its military efforts against



Figure 4. Prime Minister Botha and President Machel after signing the Nkomati Accord between South Africa and Mozambique, 16 March 1984.

UNITA, dos Santos would still depend on the USSR for military support. Moscow would hardly be sanguine about the MPLA's success, however—given its inability to defeat UNITA even with 30,000 Cubans on its side.

If dos Santos assembled a coalition that was prepared to take action on the US Namibia package and come to a reconciliation with UNITA, the Soviets could:

- Use disinformation and other active measures to exploit Luanda's fears that Pretoria and Washington are working together to force on Angola a UNITA-MPLA coalition government (or, even worse, a UNITA seizure of power).<sup>2</sup>
- Press SWAPO to step up its activities inside Namibia in hopes of turning Pretoria against a Namibia settlement.
- Promote a coup in Luanda in hopes that, if the pro-Soviet hardliners came to power, Angola would take a more confrontational approach toward South Africa and the SWAPO issue.

<sup>2</sup> The Soviets may have already increased the use of active measures to exacerbate existing suspicions and tensions between Luanda and Pretoria. In March, Soviet media quoted a purported US document that described an alleged meeting in Kinshasa of US, South African, UNITA, and Israeli officials to map out strategy for Angola. At this meeting, plans allegedly were made for stepped-up arms support to UNITA, for UNITA infiltration of MPLA military and political organs, and for destabilization in Luanda itself.

Disinformation might succeed, given the historical suspicion and distrust between Pretoria and its black African neighbors. On the other hand, it probably would be ineffective if both Luanda and Pretoria were determined to reach a settlement. The Namibian insurgents would welcome additional Soviet arms support, to step up their activities, but Moscow would have difficulty supplying SWAPO without its traditional Angolan conduit.

A coup by MPLA hardliners would bring more pro-Soviet leaders to power and, by alienating supporters of the ousted leadership, make the new regime more dependent on Soviet aid to keep itself in power. Yet, given the complex of factors that shape MPLA politics—race, tribe, ideology, and personality—Moscow could not be certain that even a successful coup would have the desired result. Tensions between the contesting MPLA factions could weaken the military—thus strengthening the position of Savimbi and his UNITA insurgents. If the coup failed, moreover, Moscow could find itself with no influence in Angola. A Soviet attempt to subvert a Namibia accord that enjoyed the support of most Africans also could jeopardize Soviet credibility and equities among other black African states.

Disinformation, coups, and similar measures also fail to take Angola beyond the basic dilemmas that prompted it to respond to South African overtures. If the USSR succeeded in destroying the recent gains, South Africa could resume its pressure on Luanda by reentering southern Angola and stepping up aid to UNITA. This would create another security crisis much like the one that prompted Moscow to send record levels of arms to Luanda in 1983. Moscow may be prepared to up the military ante, as it warned the South Africans last November, in part because the expense would not be great. (Luanda's oil earnings have minimized Soviet and Cuban financial costs in Angola.) The Soviets are unlikely, however, to pick up the economic assistance burden if the Angolan economy becomes a total shambles.

We believe that, if the Angolans resolve their internal debate on the Cuban withdrawal and decide to proceed with the US package settlement—even if it leads

to a reconciliation with UNITA—the Soviets would try to dissuade them but would ultimately bow to their wishes. At a minimum, the Soviets presumably would seek strong assurances that Luanda would retain its leftist political orientation and its close bilateral ties to the USSR. In that case, Moscow would continue to maintain a stake in Angola through its military assistance. ■

Moscow probably would seek to put a positive face on such a settlement, noting Luanda's continued leftist orientation, US recognition of the MPLA (albeit in a coalition with UNITA), and the honorable intentions of the Cubans, claiming that they had eliminated the South African security threat and then left when requested to do so. Moscow might go so far as to claim that the Namibia settlement represented a victory for the Cubans and the MPLA. While continuing to cultivate Luanda, the Soviets would turn their attention to independent Namibia—presuming a SWAPO electoral win—in pursuit of new opportunities for influence and penetration. ■

There is some slight evidence that the Soviets may be preparing for such an eventuality. In December 1983, officials from the Africa Institute and the Foreign Ministry told a visiting US academic that a military solution was not possible in Angola and that peace could only succeed with the formation of a coalition—though both officials had doubts about Savimbi's role in such a scenario. ■

Increasing candor in the Soviet press about Angola's precarious economic condition also suggests that Moscow recognizes that the MPLA may take some dramatic steps to get out of an increasingly untenable position. Recent articles in *New Times*, *Za Rubezhom*, and *Komsomolskaya Pravda* have provided alarming details about Angola's predicament: that 60 percent of the country's bridges and 90 percent of its transport facilities have been destroyed by the aggressors; that tens of thousands of teenagers were drafted in January 1984; that Luanda is experiencing a shortage of food and other essentials as its population has doubled due to the influx of refugees from the south; and that not only the territorial integrity but the independence of the young republic has been endangered. ■

#### In Mozambique

In comparison to Angola, Moscow's options in Mozambique are much more limited since Machel's dramatic about-face in his dealings with South Africa. Still, the friendly reception accorded Machel during his February trip to Moscow reflects the Soviets' desire to maintain a role and presence in Mozambique. We believe they will try to sustain the military assistance relationship—as they have in Tanzania and Guinea—despite the recent setback to their interests. Indeed, deliveries of MIG-21s have continued apace since the accords with Pretoria were signed. As for economic assistance, however, Moscow is unlikely to make any new commitments while Machel continues to accommodate Pretoria. The Soviets have shown little sympathy for Mozambique's plight during the current drought, although they have highlighted their recent food aid commitments to the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. ■

#### In Relations With SWAPO and the ANC

The Soviets will try to channel additional assistance to SWAPO and the ANC wherever possible. Moscow's efforts on their behalf, however, could increasingly strain its relations with Angola and Mozambique. The US Embassy in Maputo, for example, reports that local security officials were surprised and uneasy about the amounts and quality of weapons uncovered in recent confiscations of ANC arms caches there; they suspect that the Soviets and East Germans had transported this material without approval of the Mozambican Government. ■

Both the Angolans and the Mozambicans may well suspect a Soviet hand in any future actions by SWAPO or the ANC—such as terrorist attacks or bombings in Namibia or South Africa—that might undermine their accords with Pretoria. Moscow's public emphasis on the need to continue the liberation struggle is likely to compound such suspicions. Similar problems for the Soviets could arise in the other Frontline States, which, despite their public professions of solidarity with SWAPO and the ANC, are reluctant to provoke South African reprisals. ■

SWAPO and the ANC, in turn, are likely to be concerned that Moscow might sacrifice their interests in order to strengthen its position in Luanda and Maputo. Both liberation movements have been upgrading their ties to the Chinese, but they will ultimately be more dependent on the USSR as a result of the Angolan and Mozambican agreements with South Africa. Indeed, SWAPO and the ANC probably attach greater importance to Soviet backing than ever before, in hopes that Moscow's continued support of the liberation struggle may force Luanda and Maputo to help them also. Without access to camps and transit points in Angola and Mozambique, respectively, SWAPO and the ANC would be seriously hampered in their efforts to continue the armed struggle. [REDACTED]

#### Elsewhere in Africa

The Soviets may be concerned that the recent accords with South Africa might be perceived by other African states as evidence of the USSR's inability or unwillingness to protect its allies. [REDACTED]

As part of its propaganda effort, the USSR will try to reinforce black African antipathy toward Pretoria by publicizing the various aspects of South African apartheid policies. [REDACTED]

The Soviets naturally have focused on those issues where they share a common position with the black African states. Soviet media, for example, have highlighted the calls of all the Frontline leaders that South Africa implement the UN plan for Namibia without linking it to a Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. Similarly, Soviet commentaries have quoted the public statements of Zambian President Kaunda (that South Africa is using its peace initiative to buy time and delay Namibian independence) to reinforce the longstanding Soviet theme that Pretoria is acting in bad faith. [REDACTED]

#### *Black African Response to the Recent Accords*

*While many black African leaders have offered cautiously favorable comments about the recent agreements with Pretoria, they are reluctant to say anything that might be interpreted as approving South African behavior, lest they indirectly relieve international pressure on Pretoria to reform its domestic policies. At the same time, some Africans, such as the Ethiopians, have refrained from publicly criticizing the accords in order to avoid embarrassing "brother Africans," according to the US Embassy in Dakar. [REDACTED]*

*The negotiations with Pretoria have elicited a mixed reaction from the Frontline States not directly involved. Tanzania and Zimbabwe have only been lukewarm in expressing support. Zambia and Botswana are more supportive of the negotiations, but do not trust South Africa and are fearful that the settlement effort will fail. Many African leaders outside the immediate region are less interested in the negotiations, but have indicated their understanding that severe security and economic problems led Luanda and Maputo to deal with Pretoria. Those countries that are privately critical of the negotiations often have focused on the risk that the interests of SWAPO and the ANC will be sacrificed. Even Zairian President Mobutu has expressed such concerns, according to the US Embassy in Kinshasa. [REDACTED]*

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